Slavery was responsible for the downfall of the Roman republic

I thank my opponent for the opportunity to do this topic.

Background
The Punic Wars with Carthage came to a final end in 146BC, but the devastation still remained. Hannibal had rampaged through Italy half a century earlier, and the Italian farms had not fully recovered, creating poverty. The Roman armies, who had hitherto been taking their food from the colonies of Sardinia and Sicily, returned to Rome, and the grain followed. The mass influx of foreign grain of better quality reduced the price of grain, which further reduced the wealth of Italy significantly. Wealthy Romans began to speculate on the vast reaches of land Rome had conquered, which further exacerbated the divide between rich and poor.

The entire Roman economy hinged on grain prices. Their deterioration, coupled with some snubs from elite Romans, angered the Latins in Italy, and created a perfect storm of economic circumstances that could end in only one way for the city of Rome. Revolution. But there was another factor - one far more important:

Slaves
Although slavery had a different social function in Roman times, its economic function was identical - reduced price of labor. More slaves in the city means a greater pool of workers for the local farms and such. That in turn meant a greater supply of labor with no change to demand, hence lower prices.

All this huge influx of labor was soon bought up by the wealthy Romans, who started for the first time to establish large estates with their armies of slaves doing all the hard work. They took over the public land, that in reality nobody owned but in practice everybody squatted on. Soon the small farmers found that without the capital advantage of millions of slaves, they could not compete in farming.
In this way the Italian farmers were rapidly forced off their land entirely. They went to Rome, seeking work, and finding extreme poverty. A huge mass of the ultra poor crowded the city, desperate for any opportunity they could get, and starving terribly. By 136BC, Roman census records show the population of Italy reaching a record low of just below 20,000, and that in turn made the military power of Rome exceptionally weak. As I shall show, these slave-run estates (*latifundia*) eventually literally destroyed the republic.

It did not have to be this way. Imagine a Rome with no slavery - a Rome that had conquered Carthage and let it be, like Rome had not enslaved the Italians. In such a Rome, the Italian farmers would have eventually rebuilt their farmsteads. The provinces would have given them time to recover as they would have to supply the newly founded colony of Africa. There would be little opportunity for land speculation and certainly not for slave-run estates. With the survival of the common farmer and the backbone of the Roman economy, the republic would have been safe. Bear this alternative in mind as I continue.

**Attempts At Reform**

Two people who attempted economic reform in response to this problem were the Gracchi brothers, Tiberius and Gaius, who essentially used various political loopholes to reduce the power of the senate and increase the power of the poor mob. Both were killed by mobs of rich senators, who wanted the masses to remain largely poor because it was to their benefit.

Nonetheless, the legacy of the brothers was that they forced the senate to address the question through a land distribution council (who mostly were engaged with stealing land from the Latins). Many of the poor in Rome, in this way, gained a second chance to make a living, which massively prolonged the downfall of the republic and boosted the Italian population once more to many hundreds of thousands. Gaius established colonies overseas for the first time, which of course sowed the seeds for the capitalist senators to make more "public land" claims in the rest of the world too. And the senate, in response to all these concerns, passed for the first time a special resolution empowering it to "protect the republic" (*senatus consultum ultimum*), which basically meant all their actions were justified in the name of protecting the republic, and of course was the political power needed to just about break the whole Roman system for those who would later abuse the resolution to their own purposes.
So we see that as a direct result of slavery and the associated taking of economic power by the senate, the ruling elite of the republic also immediately asserted social and political power.

**Contribution of Marius**

The senate were actually pretty alright at managing all this power. They stopped the distribution of public land to appease the Latins, granted tenancy to all landholders, took a rent from public land that was used to feed the starving masses in Rome, and if a settler in a colony found their farm wasn’t working out, the senate would arrange for somebody else to come in and have a go at farming the land instead (and apparently this wasn’t corrupt at all). But it was not long before all kinds of individuals wanted in on this power.

The next big war Rome fought was against Jugurtha in Numidia. One of the generals in this war, Gaius Marius, returned to Rome in the middle of the war and with no prior political experience, boastfully argued his way into getting elected to the top political position in Rome, the consulship. He then used the same tactics the Gracchi used (out of necessity) to his own benefit instead - he used the mob to overrule the senate and make him the main commander of the war against Jugurtha. And then he recruited an army from the remainder of the poor mob in Rome, who were super glad to find work after some decades in poverty. In this way Marius controlled Rome’s military, economy, policy and society - something that would have been impossible had the influx of slaves not generated this terrifying series of events.

These mobsters, whom Marius quickly turned into soldiers, had a real strong sense of entitlement for all the work they did for their general, and expected their general to scratch their backs in return. This was in contrast to the old system, where the soldiers were generally loyal to the state. Marius won the consulship a record number of times and won against the Germans and against Jugurtha. Marius’ solution to the problem of the soldiers was to simply distribute land to them.

Though Marius was the first to gain this power for his personal advantage, effectively stealing it from the senate, he did not use it significantly because he did not realize the importance of controlling the estates. Nevertheless his assumption of power merely shifted where the power lay, as total proof that the intricate republican system of checks and balances through the
assemblies and courts had already been replaced by the oligarchical senate, whose power was primarily driven by slavery.

**Sulla**

Soon one of Marius’ lieutenants came to the fore - Sulla. And it happened because of the slavery.

Latin in Italy already had it tough, but other Italians had it even tougher. Their lowly rights were exceeded in their meagreness only by their lack of wealth caused by the slave estates. In 90BC, they revolted in what would become known as the social war. Sulla, previously Marius’ brilliant lieutenant, won the war essentially by allowing everybody in Italy to become a Roman citizen (about time). This social equality moved the loyalty of the people from the old social order (optimates) to that of the popular dictators (*populares*).

Meanwhile Marius seized Rome with his army and spent five days killing everybody. Not long after, Marius died. His colleague, Cinna, tried to revive the economy. But for Sulla, the allure of power was too great. After beating Mithridates he came back and totally butchered everybody in Italy. He particularly went after the rich senators and merchants whom he believed could be a threat to him. All the property he confiscated was used to pay his army, triggering a sort of wage inflation where soldiers began demanding more and more from their generals, while simultaneously ruining farms which would increasingly cut into the general’s ability to pay. Few of these soldiers actually proved good farmers, and they began to grow restless.

Sulla instilled himself as dictator of Rome, and added new members to the senate to ensure he was kept there. By controlling the estates and the slaves that drove them, Sulla obtained direct control of Rome, rather than the indirect control of Marius. He could also easily pay his soldiers, even if the net result was more poverty.

**So how did it end?**

Exactly as Sulla’s reign would have predicted. Generals increasingly had to seize more and more estates through killing their owners to maintain the ever-increasing demands of their armies, creating ever greater poverty and thus greater impetus for more generals to come in and seize even more. This vicious cycle did not end until Octavius seized so much power and killed so many people after five brutal wars primarily against other Romans, that there was no more power to
people after five brutal wars primarily against other Romans, that there was no more power to seize. He was the emperor, and took on the title Augustus, a century after the Gracchi brothers. This was the *Pax Romana* - the end of the vicious economic cycle of Romans killing each other.

It might seem strange that a shock to the labor market, significant though it was, would create so many profound changes. It illustrates why employment management is just as important on the supply side as it is on the demand, as the only people in Rome with any understanding of the economic forces at work were often among the first to be killed by the generals, who didn’t want to share the bad news with their loyal armies.

But this consequence was inevitable. The republic was founded on the ideal of separation of powers, that guides every republic today. Without that, the whole republic is destroyed. Slavery provided the critical imbalance that toppled the scales of the balance in favor of one side, which soon - quite fatally - allowed it all to end.

The resolution is affirmed.

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**Tophatdoc (CON)**

I would like to thank my opponent for hosting this debate. I hope we have fun. I as Con will be arguing that slavery was not responsible for the downfall of the Roman Republic. That does not mean that I am arguing that slavery did not play a role in the downfall but it means that it was not the primary reason for the downfall. My opponent’s objective is to show us why slavery was the primary reason for the downfall of the Roman Republic. My opponent has listed many facts, that I won’t disagree with but I will offer a contrary opinion on numerous events. My opponent, thinks that slavery was responsible for the downfall of the Roman Republic, I think that the privatization of the military is what brought about the downfall of the Roman Republic.

**Background**

I think my opponent is somewhat in error for not explaining thoroughly how slavery developed within the Roman Republic. It is of great importance to understand how slavery developed and it’s role in Roman society during the end of the Republic. Slavery in the time of the Roman Republic was of great significance because slaves were normally captured during wars. During the
Republic was of great significance because slaves were normally captured during wars. During the period of the Roman Republic, Romans engaged in over thirty wars in a period of a few centuries. Therefore, there were many captives of war who became slaves on the Italian peninsula. If slaves were not captives of war, they were usually kidnapped from their homes.

Slavery started to strengthen the role of the patricians and plebians alike in Roman society during the early part of the Punic Wars. Patricians would establish large estates with dozens or possibly hundreds of slaves to due their agricultural work. My opponent has explained this somewhat, so no need to explain further.

**Slaves**

I agree with my opponent, that agriculture was the most valuable sector of the economy. I will also agree, about

My opponent goes on to discuss how slaves and Roman patricians brought about the decline of Italian farmers. I would mention that many of the farmers, that my opponent is referring to, were not Roman citizens or they were proletarians. Many of the Italian farmers who immigrated to Rome during the 2nd century BC were not Roman citizens or partial citizens. The divide that my opponent is mentioning is about rich and poor is very unclear because he is mixing immigrants from other places in Latium and the Italian Peninsula, proletarians, and plebeians. Most historians have pointed out majority of the immigrants to Rome during this period were not even citizens of Rome, neither plebeian nor patrician. In fact, many of these immigrants were proletarians who owned no land. These proletarians, were the people who were pushed off the public lands they squatted on by those with wealthy estates. Even worse, it was very common for many of these proletarians to not understand Latin and be stuck in Latin society. A minor note, many of the slaves did not speak Latin as well.

We should not be confused about who was a Roman citizen and who was not and who may have had partial citizenship. Contrary to what my opponent believes, the Roman military did solely weaken due to starvation Rome. I would agree it did play a role in the decline in population with Rome itself. The popace also declined because of war. Rome fought in over twelve wars in the 2nd century before and during 136 BC which led to the decline in population. Previously, the Romans had not fought so many wars within a limited proximity of time. The Roman military was
based on the Roman citizenry who were "drafted."

The military focused on the citizenry providing and purchasing their own weapons. Or citizens would be given poor armor and poor weapons. People would serve in the military for a campaign than go home[Note this for later] and their army was disbanded. Now that so many people died in these wars, alternatives, had to be given in order to support these wars. This is why Romans started encouraging the use of the mercenaries in combat in mid-2nd century BC. When a century before, the idea of utilizing Latin Allies from around the Italian Peninsula was considered nauseating by many Roman officials. This is why Proletarians started to make up the Hastati rather than just the Velites. Plus many plebeians had become decadent or suffered economic loss due to the stagnation of Rome would become proletarians. So the size of the military limited without land owners. Proletarians were not included in the military until mid-2nd century when military alternatives were desired. Proletarians in the military would of been Velites who wielded a javelin and had no armor.

**Gracchi Reforms**

I agree with most of Pro’s facts. However, Pro does not explain what the Gracchi brothers were really doing. The Gracchi brothers were proposing that the Roman state give public lands to small landholders. These public lands were the spoils of the Roman conquest of Italy.

**Marian Reforms**

Pro tended to caress over what the Marian Reforms was and what it meant. Gaius Marius included elements of society who were not included in the military usually, proletarians. The reason why they were not included in the military was because they did not own any land. in turn they couldn't purchase armor or weapons. Now, the Manipular legions that once existed held no value once Marius reformed the military. Previously the legions were organized by social class: velites, hastati, principes, and triarii. The triarii were the wealthiest who had the best weapons, best armor, and best helmets. While a velite would of wielded no armor and a javelin because they couldn't afford to purchase quality weapons and armor. Gaius Marius reformed the military so that all Roman citizens could join the military. The previous form of organization had already declined in value due to inconsistency. The idea of organizing according to social class was
abandoned. The requirements to even join the military was abandoned. Gaius Marius offered citizenship to allies and mercenaries alike for aiding him on his campaigns. Those who served on his campaign were promised to receive lands and riches once a campaign was finished.

Gaius Marius paved the way to the privatization of the military. Armies would no longer serve for one campaign, disband, and then go home. Instead the military became a professional military with career soldiers. The military became a standing military based on volunteers who expected full citizenship, land, and great riches. Previously armies were assembled only to fight campaigns with soldiers who were "drafted." The Marian Reforms allowed generals to have their own private army to wield at their own whim. Whereas before, a military would be effectively disbanded after the campaign. This is what I mean when I said that privatization of the military led to the fall of the Roman Republic.

Sukka
I won’t dispute this section because I find most of it to be true.

My Conclusion
I agree with at least three quarters of the things my opponent has said. However, I don’t agree with the conclusion that slavery was the cause of the fall of the Republic. Many of the popular reforms proposed by the Gracchi brothers and the idea of giving citizenship would not have led to the fall of the republic. The privatization of the military is what led to the fall of the republic. Otherwise individuals would not be able to have a standing military over a needed military. Prior to the Marian reforms, armies were only assembled to fight one campaign and then go home. The Marian Reforms changed this allowing generals far away from home to build their own power bases to undermine Rome with a professional army. Some would use their power to promote popular reforms such as Gaius Julius Caesar who recruited non-citizens into his army. While others like Marcus Lucinius Crassus would use their private armies to enhance their own riches by going on their own campaigns.

If there had not been any privatization of the military there would never have been triumvirates or perhaps even better no Pax Romana. There would of never been the civil wars that raged amongst Romans. It was Gaius Marius’ Jurgtha campaign which led to the privatization of the military and it was his actions which gave individuals reign over their own private armies of
Military and it was his actions which gave individuals reign over their own private armies of professionals. I would say slavery has nothing to do with the privatization of the military because it has no relevance to the restructuring of the military campaign to fight the Jurgatha campaign with a professional army. The existence of slavery did not allow a power vacuum to accumulate for individuals. If the Jurgurtha campaign had never happened slavery would of still existed but the military would of remained the same with armies assembled for one campaign only. The Jurgurtha campaign gave birth to professional armies in the Roman Republic. The generals in turn used their professional armies to due their own personal bidding.

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I thank my opponent for continuing his case. It's great to have so much agreement, as it allows us to concentrate on the important issues of the debate. I also thank him for clarifying some details for voters, but I find most of them irrelevant to the debate. Do note that as con says, everything he does not dispute he finds to be true.

In my opponent's view, it was the loyalty of the armies that destroyed the republic. In mine, this was a consequence of slavery. If I thus prove that the reforms of Marius were driven by Rome's slavery laws, I win the debate.

**Con has grossly overstated the importance of the Marian reforms**

Yes, they were a factor, but they were not the most significant factor by a long shot, for a number of reasons.
The same reforms could also be utilized by the senate. Pompey the Great, for example, who frequently utilized the reforms, opposed Julius Caesar in his campaign to take Rome, in an effort to protect the republic. The reforms did make armies more effective, but having a more effective military does not necessarily mean a decline in social or political order. Today's world is quite stable, at least compared to the Classical Era, despite improvements to military technology happening all the time. So while the Marian reforms were significant to history, they were not significant to the demise of the Roman republic. Military loyal to a general rather than a state would be a problem only if the generals themselves were disloyal to the republic.

Con defends that particular claim with his "privatization of the military" argument. In fact, technically, armies were still only recruited for one campaign (or one series of campaigns, such as Marius being called by the senate to fight both Jugurtha and the Germans) at a time - only that after the campaign, the general would inspire sufficient loyalty in his troops to be able to call upon them again if needed. This is why soldiers were still largely paid in land - so that they could have a place to settle and farm afterwards. That in turn was the impetus for the problem of good soldiers not always being good farmers, not disputed by con. Military was thusly not really privatized, but rather "privatization" is a convenient modern term to represent this loyalty. This is why, for example, when Pompey was charged with defending Rome, many of the soldiers who fought under him were veterans of Caesar's.

### How loyalty changed as a result

The main difference is in the mode of pay. Since pay would be given by the general and not the state, as recruitment had also been done by the general directly, the loyalty did shift somewhat to the general. But this, too, was a consequence of slaves.

First, slaves were the reason why people needed pay in the first place. Previously they had been living happy lives as farmers, and probably did not want to fight in the military. Now they had no choice as they had been driven from their places of work.

Second, slaves provided the means with which the soldiers could be paid. By seizing these estates the generals seized economic power.
All the important aspects of the Marian reforms were inspired directly by the problems associated with slave-run estates and a reduced price of labor.

Why were the generals disloyal and try to seize power for themselves?
There were a number of reasons, but the foremost among them was because of greed. If there was power to be taken from an elite, the generals had incentives to take it. It was not always this way.

A short time earlier, before the development of the system of *latifundia*, mighty generals like Cato had ample opportunity to march on Rome and yet did not. Before the slave-run estates almost every single general was loyal to the republic, and yet afterwards, almost every single general was disloyal. So when Marius did his power-grab, that was a natural consequence of the fact that power could now be taken simply by controlling the senate. The Gracchi and their loopholes had proven that the assemblies no longer controlled any real power. The fact that power was concentrated by the senate some decades previously and consolidated through the laws of economics, directly gave the generals some power to seize that literally had not been there previously. It would be as though, in modern America, Congress asserted sole power to rule the US, taking away any real power held by the senate, the courts, the executive branch etc etc to run the country. As I mentioned, by the time of Marius the republic had *already* collapsed in all but name to an unstable oligarchy.

This is important. Generals had controlled armies before, but only after slaves became a huge issue for Rome did the rules change to allow power to be seized by them easily. And that happened before Marius, with the senate's assertion of control and protection over the republic at the time of the Gracchi brothers, which was itself because they were *able to do so*. And for that, you have slavery to thank. The most important cause should be the first one, not further consequences that are related to the original.

A further reason, as I mentioned last round, was because seizing *latifundia* was required so that the generals could pay their armies. Because of the wage inflation, literally none of the great generals from the era were not guilty of this. Sulla's invention of *proscriptions* further solidified this.
What if the Jugurtha campaign had never happened?

Even if the army had never been reformed by anybody (which I don't believe - enabling the reforms made carrying them out a natural progression), the collapse of the republic was inevitable. Let me explain, because this is simple economics.

With the rise of *latifundia*, competition for primary goods became more imperfect in Rome, so that it became what economists call an oligopoly - the market being dominated by a smaller number of larger players. Senators already control economic and political power, with the latter (via precedent) being mostly premised on the former. Economic theory thus holds that the number of senators with any real economic power would gradually shrink to around three, due to the Rule of Three (which states all oligopolies will tend towards where the market is most efficient, which is usually at three producers). Even if nobody killed anybody and the military never got involved, economics strongly suggests that the republic would have been ruled by three people sooner or later. Probably the triumvirate. Now try to justify to me how putting control of the whole country into the hands of so few is in any way a republic.

There are some other complicating factors. If not for Marius, what would the mob in Rome have done? Would the issue of settlement ever be settled? Would they have joined some slave revolt, as that of Spartacus, or perhaps destroyed Rome from the inside during the Social War? These complex externalities are difficult to account for, and can't be explained by a statistical model in the way economics can. Nevertheless it's important to note most of these alternatives also result in the collapse of the republic. Having a large mob with a good reason to dislike the way things are is usually a good way to bring down a government. The conditions for the republic's collapse were already set right long before Marius by the power of slavery.

The resolution is affirmed.

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Tophatdoc (CON)

Round Forfeited